Background

Advancing gender justice is necessary to achieving the full and equal participation of women and men in national and regional development.

The Institute for Gender and Development Studies, St. Augustine Unit, has commenced the process of developing a ***Gender Justice Scorecard*** for Trinidad and Tobago. The goal is to provide a gendered analysis of national fiscal policy and its implications for peace, security and empowerment within households, highlighting how the national budget process and budgetary allocations have differential and inequitable impact on women, men, girls and boys in a time of economic crisis.

By stimulating wider engagement with gender-sensitive budgeting, the scorecard will also support CSO capacity-building for better governance, and will provide an example of action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4 – Health, Goal 5 - Gender Equality, Goal 8 - Reduced Inequalities and Goal 16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

It is imperative that fiscal policy not worsens household vulnerabilities to insecurity, ill health and violence. Rather, women, men, girls and boys should have equitable access to opportunities and outcomes needed to advance peace, empowerment, rights and gender justice.

Glossary

Gender sensitive budgeting: is an approach designed to mainstream the gender dimension into all stages of the budget cycle. Gender sensitive budgeting is not about whether an equal amount is spent on women and men, but whether the spending is adequate to address women and men's needs. It refers to the process of conceiving, planning, approving, executing, monitoring, analysing and auditing budgets in a gender-sensitive way.

Gender justice : refers to an approach that recognises the human rights of women and men. It addresses the need to transform unequal gender power relations, cultural beliefs and norms in order to share power and responsibility between women and men. Thus, a rights-based approached to development is crucial for achieving gender equality.

Appropriation Bill/Act: The budget is a piece of legislation referred to as the Appropriation Bill. It is debated and approved by both Houses of Parliament. Each year, once assented to in the House, it becomes the Appropriation Act for that financial year. Every year the Budget changes and is reapproved. Appropriations to various sectors that matter to you change. Decisions are made that will impact your household. You have one year to advocate for justice for how our monies are spent. Make your MP represent your needs during the process of debate and approval. Remember men, women, boys and girls have different needs that must be represented.

Balance of Payments: determines how much money is going in and out of the country. This is an indicator of the financial health of our economy. If the total of all money coming into a country is less than all of the money going out, there is a balance of payment deficit. The Balance of Payments affects you. A deficit means more expensive and limited foreign exchange, which leads to higher prices for goods and services. This makes it more difficult to meet household needs. A government response will often increase national debt and cut social programmes to cover the deficit. These cuts directly impact well-being and social services. People experiencing poor health, violence, trauma, and hunger will have fewer places to turn.

Consolidated Fund / Consolidated Revenue Fund: The fund represents the main bank account of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. General taxation is paid in the Consolidated Fund and general spending comes out of the consolidated fund. The money in this account pays for roads, community programmes, policing, sanitation, waste management, and flooding relief, among others. Pay attention to the balance of this fund year to year. To meet national needs, we must know the language of the budget and monitor spending from this fund.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): GDP is a measure of domestic economic activity based on goods and services produced within the country. Per capita GDP is how much is produced in a country divided by its total population. GDP gives us a sense of how much the country is producing and our ability to trade in global markets. Low GDP suggests high imports, low production, and fewer local employers. Buying local supports local producers, strengthens local economy, increases domestic earnings and lowers prices for goods and services. This supports our local investment in agriculture, food production, and sustainability. Demand a Budget that increases GDP beyond the offshore economy.

The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund: This is a savings and investment fund established in 2007 to generate income to support public expenditure during revenue downturn. The fund provides an inheritance for future generations from excess oil and gas revenue. The more we spend and waste now, the less we have for future expenditure, subsidies, social services, and investment. Our children's inheritance and their future needs for justice and sustainability must be a priority in managing the fund.

Debt-To-GDP Ratio: The debt to GDP ratio is the country's public debt compared to its gross domestic product (GDP). By comparing what a country owes to what it produces, the debt-to-GDP ratio indicates the country's ability to pay back its debts. More debt means less resources to be allocated for the country's needs. Governments cut social services and public sector employment to pay debt. Demand that our earnings are strategically allocated to raise the GDP. Reduce debt by challenging corruption and wasteful spending. Investment in economic activity such as local producers and innovation can result in foreign exchange to reduce debt and relieve the burden on working people and the most vulnerable.

Draft Estimates of Expenditure: This projects the funds the government intends to spend on its programmes and projects from different ministries, agencies, and departments. Every year government ministries, agencies, and departments make decisions about the country's needs. These estimates for programmes and projects determine what services would be available to your household. Estimates are prepared from January of each year. Make your MP aware of your ideas early. Recommend projects and programmes for submission as part of these estimates.

Fiscal policy: Fiscal Policy indicates the government's position and procedures on public spending, taxation, income, and private sector assistance. It reveals how and when the government may decrease or increase spending, and intervene in market forces that threaten economic stability. During challenging economic times, the government may offer tax breaks for private sector investment or production to alleviate unemployment, influence trade, and control inflation. Understanding the fiscal policy is vital for effective advocacy on budget decisions. The policy tells us how, when, and why the government will act during moments of economic crises. It is our job to insist that policy decisions are timely, transparent, and advance gender justice.

Public Sector Investment Programme: PSIP is the budget and strategic plan for the government's investment in public sector policies, projects, and programmes. This programme shows the government's priorities for social development for a fiscal year. The purpose of the programme is to address social needs and problems, including violence, unemployment, insecurity, and inequality. The country's ability to meet global commitments and local needs can be disrupted or bolstered through these allocations. Demand that spending from the PSIP be accountable to these commitments and needs.